

Comparison of the function of a bitted bridle and different types of bitless bridles – a preliminary analysis

Summary

The aim of the study was to compare the response of horses to riding aids during riding in a bitted bridle and a bitless bridle. Three types of bridle were used for the research: the snaffle bridle and two bitless bridles – Dr Cook's and sidepull. Five Polish Halfbred horses were tested first in the bitted bridle and then in Dr Cook's (three horses) and the sidepull bridle (two horses). Each of the horses was tested five times in the bitted bridle and the bitless bridle. Four tests were performed. In the first two, the number of steps was counted and the time the horse required to complete the task was determined. In the other two, points were awarded for how well the tasks were performed (1-3 points). In addition, after all tasks were completed, points were assigned (1-3 points) for the horse's behaviour (researcher's assessment) and riders' satisfaction (rider's assessment). In addition, behavioural reactions were recorded that may indicate the horse's level of comfort during the test: head shaking, pulling the reins, opening the mouth, nervous tail movements, and ear pinning. Statistical analysis of the results was performed using the Kruskal-Wallis test. Correlations between behaviours and the rider's assessment were determined using Spearman's rank order correlation. Horses working with a sidepull bridle responded more efficiently to riding cues than those with bitted bridles. However, there were no statistically significant differences between Dr Cook's bridle and the snaffle bridle. Mounts with bitless bridles received higher marks for riding satisfaction. Sidepull bridles received the highest ratings. Horses with bitted bridles showed a higher frequency of behaviours indicating discomfort.

KEY WORDS: bridles, bitless bridle, riding comfort, discomfort